

1357 HEATON (Geo.)

A REVIEW  
OF A  
REPORT OF A COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,  
ON THE  
PERMANENT CURE  
OF  
REDUCIBLE HERNIA OR RUPTURE.

BY GEORGE HEATON, M.D.

Member of the Mass. Med. Soc.; Fellow of the Royal Society of Physicians and Surgeons, London; of the Westminster and London Medical Societies; of the Parisian Medical Society of France, &c.

FIAT JUSTITIA, RUANT PRINCIPES ATHENARUM.—*Antiq. Fab.*

BOSTON:  
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CHADWICK,  
EXCHANGE STREET.

1853.



Λ

R E V I E W

OF A

REPORT OF A COMMITTEE

OF THE

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

ON THE

PERMANENT CURE

OF

REDUCIBLE HERNIA OR RUPTURE.

BY GEORGE HEATON, M.D.

Member of Mass. Med. Soc; Fellow of the Royal Society of Physicians and Surgeons, London; of the Westminster and London Medical Societies; of the Parisian Medical Society of France, &c.

---

FIAT JUSTITIA, RUANT PRINCIPES ATHENARUM.—*Antiq. Fab.*

---

28424

B O S T O N :

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CHADWICK,

EXCHANGE STREET.

1853.



## REVIEW.

---

A Committee appointed by the American Medical Association, to investigate the subject of the permanent cure of Reducible Hernia, having made a report on the same, wherein they come to certain conclusions, which a long and extensive experience in the treatment of Hernia has convinced me to be unsustained by facts, and make a certain statement in regard to me which is not true, basing thereon some reflections alike unwarrantable and unworthy of honorable men, I am induced to submit the following review of the Report to the consideration of the profession.

Before considering the subject matter of the report, I will notice briefly the particular portion which the Committee have seen fit to devote to me.

In speaking of certain communications received by them from various sources, they say :

“The writer of the fourth letter, George Heaton, M. D., of Boston, has devoted himself pretty extensively to the treatment of Reducible Hernia, and had given notice to that effect, from time to time, for some years, in medical and other publications. \* \* \*

The Committee, therefore, *sent him not only a copy of the questions which they had addressed to the profession at large*, but they also wrote him a private note, couched in the most respectful terms. To this he made a courteous reply, but, at the same time, declined giving the information sought for. Not content with this, he caused the note addressed to him, and his answer, to be printed in several newspapers, which has, in our opinion, given him a notoriety, wherever the transaction is known, of a very unenviable character.

It is certainly an unusual course for a member of our profession to conceal from his brethren any method of treatment which he may regard as more valuable than those in common use; and it is clearly one which cannot be too strongly reprobated by all honorable and high-minded men."

In this, there are two sources of complaint—the publication of their letter to me, with my reply, and my refusal to make them the medium of communicating my discovery to the world. The latter point I will discuss anon. I will only say of it now, that I feel myself fully competent, and imagine I have the right, to make known any discoveries that I may make, without the aid of any other man or committee of men, at such time, and in such way, as may be convenient to me.

The statement of the Committee, in regard to the publication of our correspondence, grossly misrepresents the whole matter, and conveys a totally wrong impression.

I will state the case briefly, and let the profession draw their own inferences.

The Committee assert that they sent me, in the first place, a copy of the questions which they addressed to the profession at large.

Whether such a copy was sent to any or every other member of the profession, and if so, at what time, I know not. Nothing of the kind was ever sent to me; and it was not until after I had rendered doubtful, by my reply to their note, whether I should communicate my discovery through them, or not, that these questions were published in the Boston daily journals, addressed to the profession and public at large. The only communication I ever received from the Committee, was the following:

BOSTON, Oct. 30th, 1851.

DEAR SIR:—The undersigned are a Committee of the Am. Med. Association, to prepare a report on the "Radical Cure of Hernia." Being aware that you have given much attention to this interesting branch of surgery, and learning that your method of treatment has been attended with a great degree of success, they are desirous of ascertaining from you what is the precise mode you adopt, and what has been the general result.

They trust that you will readily communicate such information as may aid them in the performance of the duty assigned them by the Association, and a compliance with their wishes at your earliest convenience, will be gratefully felt and acknowledged by your friends and humble servants,

GEO. HAYWARD,  
J. MASON WARREN, } *Committee.*  
S. PARKMAN.

GEO. HEATON, M. D.

Although I was unable to see the propriety of a request on the part of those who did not profess to know anything of any practical value of a subject, to obtain from one the results which patience, perseverance, and years of hard study had afforded him on the same subject, merely that they might be the medium of heralding his discoveries to the profession, and considered their supposition, that I would readily accede to their request, as an hypothesis which neither they nor any other reasonable man ought to entertain, I still concluded, considering the very courteous manner of the Committee, to give their request due consideration. After having done so, I submitted to them the following reply, some two weeks or more after I received their note.

BOSTON, Nov. 17th, 1851. }  
No. 2, EXETER PLACE. }

GENTLEMEN:—Your note of the 30th ult., requesting me to communicate to you the precise mode I adopt for the radical cure of Reducible Hernia, in order to assist you in making out a report, in compliance with the wishes of the Am. Med. Association, was duly received.

I at once took the matter into consideration, and determined to comply with your polite request. Upon more mature reflection, however, I found that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for me to do so, and at the same time do justice to myself and the subject, in the limited time allowed me.

I have devoted, as you are aware, many years to the careful investigation of this important branch of surgery, and have, I am

happy to say, discovered a safe and certain method of curing a complaint which has so long baffled the skill of our profession.

But, knowing that so many surgeons of eminence have so far convinced themselves of their ability to cure the disease, that they have actually published to the world their particular modes of operation—no one of which, however, has outlived its author—and, on the contrary, knowing that many, by prematurely thrusting their supposed discoveries upon the profession, have not only brought upon themselves censure, but even ridicule,—I determined, even long after I had satisfied myself, and verified my theory, by hundreds of successful cases, that it should be subjected to the more convincing test of time, and consequently delayed publishing it to the profession.

After long deliberation, I decided that I would either publish the matter through a paper, or more at length in a volume, and finally had determined to follow the latter course.

If I shall determine to publish, as preliminary to my work, a paper on the subject, I shall be most happy, gentlemen, to make you the medium of communication. In the meantime, hoping that you will excuse the delay I have shown in replying to your note, and thanking you for your kind recognition of my claims, I am your friend and humble servant,

GEORGE HEATON.

GEO. HAYWARD, M. D., J. MASON WARREN, M. D., S. PARKMAN, M. D.	}	<i>Committee Am. Med. Association.</i>
--	---	--

It was after I sent them this reply, that certain questions appeared in the daily journals, addressed, seemingly, to the medical profession, but virtually, like every thing else in a public journal, to the public at large.

The Committee, all Boston men, knew well, and the public knew well, that I had been attending for some ten or twelve years, to the radical cure of Hernia, and also, as the Committee admit, that my method had been attended with a great degree of success.

After having requested me, then, to make to them an *exposé* of my peculiar mode of treatment, and having obtained what they



deemed to be my refusal to do so, with my reasons assigned, (which they have, however, carefully, and most inexcusably, kept out of their report,) they appealed through the daily press to the public.

Now what, I ask, would be the inference which any man unacquainted with the whole truth of the matter, would draw from reading an appeal from eminent physicians, through the columns of a newspaper, desiring to be furnished with data,—if any such there were,—bearing on the radical cure of Hernia? Manifestly, that there was no cure for Hernia known.

Should I, then, suffer so false an impression to be spread abroad, when I had professed, for years, to cure Hernia? When the public, or a large portion of it, at least, had understood that I did? When the medical profession throughout the country, and some of its leading members in Europe, understood it? When the very members of this Committee not only knew it, but knew of its great success?

Did the Committee suppose, when they published those questions, calculated to brand me, in the eyes of those who read them, as an impostor, and all my pretensions, for ten years, as quackery, that I would neglect to notice them, merely to gratify an unwillingness on their part, to have what they pretended to be their honest sentiments made known? That I would disregard my own welfare, and that of those dependent on me, merely for fear of some imaginary breach of the laws of etiquette? If they did, they must have supposed me to be destitute of the very common and necessary instinct of self-defence, or, at all events, to be a very different person from what I am. I can assure them, that had their note been of a private nature, as it in reality was not, it would have been given to the public under like circumstances.

The note contained, as I supposed, their honest sentiments; and, although containing nothing of a private nature, as any one may see by referring to it, would still have been cheerfully kept private, had not their course afterwards obliged me to publish it as a matter of self-defence. It was the only means I could adopt to destroy effectually the false, and to me fatal impression, which their appeal was calculated to produce. If they did not mean what they said in their note,—if it was only an ingenious trap to catch

an unsuspecting victim, they may have reason to regret its publication; but not to charge me with any breach of professional or other etiquette. I repel any such imputation as an ill-disguised sophism to conceal a more ill-disguised feeling.

As to the opinion of the Committee, that the transaction, wherever known, has given me a notoriety of a most unenviable character, I must beg leave to differ from them entirely.

As far as I can judge, from conversation with distinguished members of the profession, and from communications received from all parts of the country, immediately after the publication of those letters, the notoriety which accrued to me was eminently of an enviable character; if, by envy, we are to understand (as the Committee seems to) the desire on the part of one person to come into the condition of another.

The majority of the profession, and the public generally, probably neither cared nor thought any thing of the letters themselves, or of the circumstances of their publication, any further than as they were the vehicle of conveying the announcement, that a new and valuable discovery had been made in surgery. The notoriety in question, seemed to me to be precisely that which would attach to any author of a discovery which had been confirmed by scientific men.

It was such, for example, as accrued to the discoverer of the anæsthetic power of sulphuric ether, after its value had been attested by this Committee and others, at the Mass. Gen. Hospital. And the opinion of the Committee on the particular mode in which this discovery was made known to the world, is of as little interest or consequence to the profession and the public, as the almost endless discussion known as the "Ether controversy."

The welfare of mankind being of so much more consequence than the laws of etiquette, men do not stop to enquire whether these latter have been fully observed in making a valuable discovery known.

An engineer announces that he has discovered a mode of substituting heated air for steam, in the propulsion of machinery. It is immaterial to the public whether the gentleman consulted his fellow engineers and mechanics, or not, so long as it has faith in the genuineness of his discovery.

The opinion of the Committee, on this point, I deem to be false; and, whether false or true, of no value whatever, and totally out of place in a report purporting to treat of the radical cure of Hernia. The relevancy of the laws of etiquette to the approximation of the pillars of the abdominal ring, the true point to be discussed in such a report, I have yet to learn.

The Committee assert that "it is an unusual course for a member of our profession to conceal from his brethren any method of treatment which he may regard as more valuable than those in common use."

Without being the apologist or defender of selfishness, as exhibited by the medical or any other profession, I doubt the truth of the assertion as a general one. It is an adage, almost an axiom, that every physician makes his own theory and practice.

The evident and immediate consequence of this is, that there are as many different modes of treating diseases in general (there are exceptions of course) as there are physicians. Another fact, with which we are all acquainted, and which has always been the standing reproach of the profession, is the jealousy, almost proverbial, which exists among its members. The origin of this feeling is not, it is true, to be charged upon physicians themselves, but probably to that disposition or desire on the part of patients or their friends, in critical or difficult cases, to change their medical attendants. The effect of it is, to induce them to study out more carefully than they otherwise might, successful modes of treating disease; and while they would not withhold from the profession or public the matured results of their careful experience, they do not feel called upon to pause from their labors at the command of every tyro, until he shall be instructed equally with themselves. Physicians, generally, do not fling this as a reproach at each other, but consider it a merit rather. Complaints, if they ever do come, emanate from those who, having become independent of their profession, have time to instruct, in their peculiar ethics, their less fortunate brethren, since they are not likely to be called upon to act up to them. The "*high-minded and honorable men*" of whom the Committee make mention, I have too often found to be those, who, by an illustrious name handed down through a long line of ancestry, or by a compe-

teney of the means of subsistence, which has come to them over the same royal road, are independent of the labors to which other men are subject, and can, from their position of leisure, launch their darts at their more laborious brethren with impunity. So far from fearing to lose the esteem of such men, I am quite willing to be the object of their reprobation.

I do not wish to be understood as basing the defence of my position on any ground of expediency, but, as the Committee have taken the liberty to decide summarily certain points which are, at least, open for discussion, I have presumed to differ from them.

In my course, I profess to have followed no authority or precedent whatever, but to have been governed by my own idea of right, and the course I have taken is so in accordance with my own convictions of duty, that nothing would have induced me to swerve from it.

There is another fact, of which, however insignificant in itself, as it involves a point of etiquette, the profession may as well be informed.

The Association, as I am told by one who was present, appointed the Chairman of this Committee alone, giving him the privilege of selecting two others as associates. Now one would suppose, *a priori*, that in such a case, if there was one particular member of the profession whom the Chairman knew to have devoted more time than any one else to Hernia—whose mode of treatment, practised daily for years, he knew had been attended with great success,—he would, out of mere regard for professional courtesy, have selected this individual as an associate, instead of choosing one who, however otherwise distinguished as a surgeon, knew nothing more of the matter in question than he himself knew, and then, having completed his body corporate, turn deliberately to the individual whom he acknowledged to be the depositary of all the facts of any value not already known, and request him (very politely indeed) to make an *exposé* of his “precise mode” of treatment, and a general history thereof, in order, forsooth, that these three individuals might have the privilege of communicating it to mankind.

Verily, the Committee must either have regarded me as totally incapacitated for communicating my discoveries to the world, or as too modest to make them known without the aid of an interpreter, to neither of which hypotheses, I must say, do I plead guilty.



The charge of a want of philanthropy on my part, (which I conceive to be the essence of what the Committee recommend to the reprobation of honorable and high-minded men,) from their own admission, is reflected directly back on themselves.

They admit, without any qualification, that they have learned of the great success of my operation in the treatment of Hernia, and yet not one of the Committee, that I am aware of, ever sent or even recommended a patient to me.

Whenever patients of theirs have consulted me, it has been of their own accord, or at the suggestion of some friend; never by the advice of the physicians themselves in the outset.

In cases where they have informed their physicians beforehand, that they were about to place themselves under my care, the former have, indeed, condescended to assure them (as the patients themselves have informed me) that "Dr. Heaton has had much experience in the treatment of Hernia, and they would undoubtedly be safe in his hands."

Most of my patients from out of town have been sent to me by their physicians. In a majority of cases, these physicians have had no more to rely on than the mere announcement through a medical journal, that I treated Hernia; yet, on the bare peradventure that I might cure it, hundreds have been thus recommended to my care.

If the Committee were aware, as they assert they were, of my great success in treating Hernia, it certainly would have been the truest philanthropy on their part (according to any plausible definition of the word philanthropy) to recommend the afflicted to one "in whose hands, from his long experience in the treatment of Hernia, they would undoubtedly be safe."

I will give a brief history of my experience in the treatment of Hernia,—of the encouragement and discouragement with which I have been favored by sundry of my professional brethren, and let those who are ignorant of the matter draw their own conclusions as to who is in the right and who in the wrong.

As the Committee have much to say of the operation by injection, the value of which, in my opinion, they exaggerate entirely, and the origin of which, whether accidentally or intentionally, they at-

tribute to the wrong source, I will give the true account of the origin and value of this operation; from which, I will premise, two conclusions will be obvious, at variance with those to which the Committee seem to have come. First, that Dr. Pancoast is not the originator of the operation by injection; that I performed it, and described it to my friend Dr. Mott, of New York; and, moreover, that Dr. Jayne, of Illinois, had invented an instrument for performing said operation, and secured letters patent on the same some two years before Dr. Pancoast, according to his own account, made any experiments with it. Secondly, that the subcutaneous operation by injection of the hernial sac, is neither a simple nor advisable operation; that, although successful in many cases, if rightly performed, the difficulty of performing it without bad consequences ought to condemn it entirely.

My attention, with that of Dr. Hart, of Alton, Illinois, was first directed more particularly to the operation by injection of the sac, for the radical cure of Hernia, by Dr. Jayne, who had invented an instrument for performing such an operation, and before coming to us, had, in the year 1840, secured a patent on the same.

Having at that time under our care several cases of Reducible Hernia among the convicts in the Penitentiary at Alton, we immediately set about testing the value of the operation on the persons of these, and also on that of some of the blacks at St. Louis. The operation consisted in injection of the sac subcutaneously with an irritating fluid, by means of the instrument before mentioned. In the selection of a fluid for the purpose, Dr. Jayne gave the preference to some one of the essential oils, using now and then tincture of cantharides. In my first operations I used also the essential oils, but soon abandoned them for the tincture of iodine. I believe, therefore, that I performed the operation of injection with iodine, of which so much has been said, before any other man.

Before our experiments, the operation of injection by the subcutaneous method had never been performed either in this country or in Europe. At least no report had been made of any such operation, and there is no reason to suppose that it had ever been undertaken.

With the success of these experiments we were much elated, and

felt that the desideratum for the radical cure of Hernia had at length been discovered. Subsequently, in November, 1841, I communicated the result of the operation to Dr. Valentine Mott, of New York. He expressed himself highly pleased with it, and made a complimentary allusion to it in his lectures before the University.

In the Spring of 1842 I came to Boston, where I had concluded to remain, and make the treatment of Hernia a speciality. Having obtained an introduction to the leading members of the profession in Boston, and particularly to the Surgeons of the Mass. Gen. Hospital, I informed these latter of my intention, and offered to operate in their presence, on any case or cases which they would furnish me, and let them see the result, knowing well that such cases were continually coming under the notice of physicians, and were probably always to be found in the hospital. No notice was taken of this offer, no cases were furnished me.

Although I considered that I was under no obligation to those who had shown such entire want of what I believed to be common courtesy, I still, some six months after this, when I had, through the kindness of a medical friend, obtained several cases of Reducible Hernia, addressed the surgeons to whom I had made my original proposal, and other members of the profession, a polite note, inviting them to be present and witness me operate for the radical cure of Hernia. Most of those invited were present, and witnessed the operation. I felt then that I had done my part, that I had cleared myself, at all events, of the liability to a charge of a want of professional courtesy; and from that day to the present I have taken an entirely independent course.

Feeling that these men, not only by the total want of encouragement, but the complete discouragement which I had received from them, had forfeited all right to expect any further advances from me, I resolved to rely entirely on my own individual effort for success, and in spite of the frowning, discountenancing, nay, the very direct opposition which the would-be leaders of the profession here have shown me, I have so relied to this day, and thank fortune that I have leaned on no broken reed.

So much for my course, on which the Committee have seen fit to reflect so severely. I will only say in addition, that such reflections

ill come from the very ones from whose want of courtesy and good feeling the course which they reprobate was entered upon.

The operation by injection, in many cases so satisfactory and apparently so permanent, in others was not so. Frequently it required to be repeated several times on the same individual, and in all cases the utmost care was required in its performance to avoid troublesome consequences, as, I understood, those of the Committee who undertook it found out.

Becoming dissatisfied with this operation, and having already, in the course of my investigations, tested every principle of any degree of plausibility which had been suggested or relied upon by operators in times past, for the cure of Hernia, with no satisfactory results, I felt that the only hope of a permanent cure in all or in a majority of cases of Hernia, lay in some *modus operandi*, the effect of which should be an approximation of the pillars of the abdominal ring, or a closure of the tendinous openings. For a long time, therefore, I conducted all my researches with a view of getting at some principle which would enable me to accomplish this.

These researches, in which of necessity I was obliged to rely almost entirely on theory alone, did conduct me, I am happy to say, to precisely such a principle; a principle on which I have based a mode of treatment and operation which closes effectually and permanently the various openings through which hernial protusions take place. Not only, indeed, does it do this, but in those cases where, from a general weakness resulting from the extreme delicacy of the textures connected with Hernia, or a thinness, as it were, of the *parietes abdominales*, there is a positive predisposition to the complaint, I have found that it rendered the part firmer and better able to resist pressure than in its original condition.

In such cases, where there has been a recurrence of Hernia, I have almost invariably found it occurring at some other opening. Thus, when I have cured a person of oblique Inguinal Hernia, and he has afterwards, from a fall or violent strain, brought it on anew, it has proved, almost without exception, to be direct Inguinal Hernia.

The Committee are aware, and every physician who knows the anatomy of the parts thoroughly must be aware, that any operation for the radical cure of Hernia must be, at the best, a delicate



operation, and an operation which an unskilful or unpractised hand would undertake with no little hazard. And yet it might be an operation, the apparent simplicity of which would strike any one ignorant of the complicated anatomy of Hernia, the vital organs and vessels involved therein. The history of the attempts at the cure of Hernia furnishes, we all know, a series of catastrophes perhaps unequalled in the annals of any other branch of surgery.

Such is the frequency of the complaint, the alarming condition which it so often assumes, and to which it is always liable, and the readiness with which men submit to any operation likely to cure it, that it has always furnished a broad and fruitful field for the labors of quackery and imposition.

Suppose, then, an operation against which skepticism, from a high quarter, has already directed its attacks, should be announced to the world, the apparent simplicity of which were its obvious characteristic. What, according to the reason and experience of every physician, would be its probable destiny? It would be undertaken by surgeons of every grade of capacity, by quacks of every grade of villainy. With the more skilful and more experienced of the former, it would probably be attended with success. With those of less experience and manual skill, it would undoubtedly be condemned, not from its own deficiency, but simply from their inability to perform it.

The attempts of the latter class would, in a majority of cases, prove most unfortunate, if not fatal to those who might fall into their hands. All the evil results would be attributed not to their true cause, the fact of a man's undertaking what he is not competent to perform, but unquestionably to the operation itself.

That this is not all theory, I think I have letters in my possession to prove. I have been applied to from various parts of the country, through letters, by non-professional men, desiring to obtain from me, by payment or otherwise, my mode of operation; and by persons whose very letters show their entire ignorance of Hernia, and their utter incompetency to undertake so difficult a branch of surgery as a profession.

It is this class of reckless experimenters who would eagerly seize an operation apparently simple, which promised to cure a complaint

so universally prevalent as Hernia, and whose efforts would, in a very short time, condemn both the operation and its author to inglorious oblivion.

I am not so destitute of foresight as to run any such risk in making haste to publish a discovery of mine. Although satisfied early of the value of my operation, I determined not to give it to the world until its success should have placed it beyond the reach of cavil or skepticism. Such was the ground I took in my letter to the Committee, and such is the ground on which I defend myself from the unjust and dishonorable reflections in their report.

But, setting aside all apologies and extenuations, how the Committee can so ignore the indisputable right which every man has to make known a discovery he may have made in science, at such time and in such way as he may see fit, is beyond my comprehension. It is a right which, if we have any rights as individuals, is so evident, that any man or any society that shall attempt or pretend to override it, certainly lays itself open to the charge of an unwarrantable assumption of authority.

The Committee have presumed not to form an opinion only—which of itself would be of no consequence,—but, on the ground of that opinion, to base certain reflections for the public ear, when the very premises on which alone a correct opinion may be formed are entirely unknown to them.

A man may, for the very best of reasons, keep a certain discovery for a time to himself. It may be necessary both for his own safety and that of the discovery itself. Nay, the case is supposable, and even probable, where it may be the part of the highest philanthropy for him to do so.

A surgeon, for example, from long experience in performing a very delicate operation, for an ever-varying and always complicated complaint, may have so disciplined his sense of touch, and have acquired such delicacy of manipulation, that he can detect those peculiarities, whether anatomical or abnormal, a knowledge of which is absolutely essential to the successful treatment of the complaint, and adapt his mode of treatment to the Protean phases it may assume. This faculty, acquired only by long experience, he knows he cannot communicate to another; yet on it the success of his

operation mainly depends. The mere description of the operation he may give to any one; but in the hands of other men it is very sure to prove unsuccessful. In this want of success he of course must share, until finally the operation is condemned, merely because other men lack the ability to perform it.

Yet, according to the Committee's theory of condemnation, the very course on the part of the surgeon which would secure to humanity the benefit of such an operation, is not merely to be found fault with, but actually held up to the reproach of all honorable and high-minded men.

The absurdity of such a judgment, on the part of sensible men, is to me so manifest, that I deem it almost an insult to common sense to expose it; and had they seen fit, in their report, to have stated their own private opinion in regard to my course, although it must have been entirely without foundation, it might have remained on record undisturbed; but as they have gone still further, and founded on this baseless opinion certain reflections derogatory to my character, I cannot refrain from holding up so dishonorable, if not libellous an attack, as eminently worthy the reprobation of every true gentleman in the profession and community. I find nothing generous, nothing manly in such an attack. Indeed, what I have done to merit it I cannot divine. I am not aware that I ever intentionally insulted any one of the Committee. If my course has not been such as comes up to their idea of philanthropy, they may in their hearts pity my want of humanity, but never, while I am not doing evil to my fellow men, upbraid me publicly. I flatter myself, however, that I feel quite as tenderly for those suffering in mind or body, as they do. I think I might descend to the same acts of charity and self-sacrifice. In the faculty of deliberately attacking a fellow physician who is pursuing the even tenor of his course, and perchance doing good in an humble way, without interfering in the least with others—of attempting to undermine the reputation which years of steady industry may have afforded him—I yield the palm most willingly to the Committee, and trust they may find quiet repose on such laurels. I must inform them, however, that denunciation founded on mere surmise, from however lofty a source it may emanate, and however well it may

answer as an apology for the meagreness of a report, is not likely to be digested as truth by the generality of men of sense and honor.

After expressing their acknowledgment to the few physicians who have furnished them with the results of their experience in the treatment of Hernia, they assert that they have not obtained all, in this way, which the Association had a right to expect. Just how extensive may have been the expectations of the Association, in fact, just whom the Committee mean by the Association, it is not easy to tell.

I understand the American Medical Association to include all regular physicians in the country. A majority of these, probably, had no expectation whatever in regard to any of the reports of the various committees.

Those who might have had any in regard to that of the Committee on Hernia, imagined, I presume, that this Committee themselves had something extraordinary which they were anxious to divulge, and were not to furnish a report of various unsuccessful attempts to cure Hernia, already made known to the profession over and over again, by their authors and others treating on Hernia, and without exception abandoned as failures. That surgeons of high standing should presume to fill out the pages of a report with an exposition of operations of such notorious worthlessness and barbarity as those of cauterization, ligature, suture, invagination, &c., was more than the Association had reason to expect or desire. It certainly was to be hoped, for the honor and welfare of the medical profession, that such operations, already expounded and exploded *ad satietatem* one would suppose, might never again be dragged out from their obscurity, and paraded before the profession and public to increase a prejudice, already sufficiently strong, against physicians, but might be permitted to rest in peace, as sad monuments of the rashness and complete disregard of life of which scientific men may be guilty. Had any troubled themselves to think of the matter beforehand, they would, of course, have seen that had a particular individual anything really new and valuable in regard to the treatment of Hernia, he would be far more likely to make it known *per se* when he saw fit, than to take advantage of



even so distinguished a medium of communication as this Committee furnished.

The interest created among physicians in general by their appeal, seems to have been by no means commensurate with the Committee's expectations. From the entire medical profession throughout the country, (exclusive, I suppose, of the Canadas and Mexico,) seven only have thought it worth while to furnish them with communications, the value of which may be inferred from the fact, that the sweeping conclusions at the close of their report condemn them without mercy or apology.

Their language seems to imply that, in their opinion, many physicians have kept back valuable information which they had a right to expect; and I only wonder, considering the particular notice they have taken of one individual for his inexcusable reserve, that they did not condense their indignation against all these other imaginary delinquents into, at least, one general sentence of condemnation.

At the close of their report are three conclusions, which seem to contain the sum and substance of their efforts to perform the duty assigned them by the Association.

As I presume I have had more experience in the treatment of Hernia than the Committee and all those whose communications they give in their report together — having, as far as I can learn from the published accounts of their experience, treated and cured a hundred cases where they have attempted one—I shall take the liberty to examine these conclusions critically.

They are as follows:

1. "There is no surgical operation at present known which can be relied on, with confidence, to produce in all instances, or even in a large proportion of cases, a radical cure of Reducible Hernia."

This conclusion I, of course, affirm to be false in toto. I assert that there is a surgical operation which can be relied on with confidence, to produce a radical cure of Hernia, not only in a large proportion of cases, but in all cases which one could reasonably expect to be cured; and I am ready to prove the assertion by referring the skeptical to five hundred cases,\* or more, if they

\* I have given a few examples of these as an appendix to this Review.

choose, including those of almost every degree of severity, exhibiting the complaint in nearly every form which, it seems to me, it is possible for it to assume, and as it occurs in those of every age, from the infant of nine months to the adult of seventy years,—treated and radically cured by this operation.

2. “That they regard the operation of injection by the subcutaneous method, as the safest and best. This will, probably, in some cases produce a permanent cure, and in many others will afford great relief.”

As this conclusion is entirely empirical, I suppose the one who has had the most extensive experience with the operation, may be permitted to decide upon its merits. As to its being the safest and best, I will only say, that I think it neither safe nor well for the Committee to recommend it in any such terms. Certain it is, that in the hands of inexpert operators it is very far from being a safe operation; in the hands of none, whether expert or not, is it the best. The second portion of this conclusion is of no consequence. The same might be said, with equal truth, of the obsolete operations of cauterization, invagination, the royal stitch, and various other barbarities which the humanity of modern surgeons has condemned. No one doubts that in some cases they did produce permanent cures, while in many other cases, the relief afforded by them was certainly permanent and final as to all troubles of the body.

3. “That compression, when properly employed, is, in the present state of our knowledge, the most likely means of effecting a radical cure in the greatest number of cases.”

As to compression as a curative agent, twelve years’ experience in the treatment of Hernia has led me to a different conclusion entirely. As a remedial agent, as an agent essential to the safety of those afflicted with Hernia, before they are radically cured, I do not wish to detract from its value. That now and then persons are cured by means of compression, is not to be denied. But as a curative agent in general, it is not to be relied on at all.

I have known, and so have the Committee, in all probability, the most favorable cases to have received almost perfect compression, from well-constructed trusses, and that, too, for a period sometimes of twenty years, without having their aspect changed, unless for the worse, in the slightest degree.

There are some other points in the report deserving criticism, and some not connected with it, which I may have occasion to notice at a future time. In what I have said, I may have shown feeling, perhaps too much. My apology is, that I have had to defend what I know in my heart to be an honorable course, against an uncalled-for and unjust attack, which would represent it not only as dishonorable, but as worthy the reproach of honorable men. Engaged in defence of character, I have spoken decidedly. I have no disposition to offer insult, and cannot brook it, come whence it may. For condemning misstatements, misrepresentation, and pernicious opinions, by whomsoever made or entertained, I offer no apology.

Taking the report as a whole, as it has failed to add to our knowledge a single new fact or principle from which future good is likely to be derived, while, as a review of various obsolete operations, its place was more than supplied by a similar review by Dr. Bryant, of which it seems to be little more than a mere transcript; and, moreover, as they have seen fit to make it the vehicle of an ungentlemanly attack upon a private individual, for not complying with an arbitrary request—an individual, too, towards whom one of the Committee, at least, had not shown even common courtesy—it is certainly unworthy the character of the Association for which it was prepared.





## APPENDIX.

---

I have here subjoined skeleton reports of a few cases, taken at random from my journal. It will be readily seen by those conversant with Hernia, that these exhibit the complaint in its most aggravated form, and are those which serve as tests of the value of any operation for its radical cure. In all or nearly all of them, the Hernia could not be retained with any truss; the patient suffered great pain at times, and constant inconvenience; in many, a bad varicocele or enlargement of the spermatic veins accompanied the Hernia; while in others, these two complaints were combined with hydrocele. The time I have required patients, in such cases, to remain under my care, has been ordinarily from two to three weeks.

The impression, which I find to be quite general, that my mode of treating Hernia requires a formidable surgical operation, I would here state to be entirely wrong. The operation which I perform is wholly subcutaneous, and is done with a delicate instrument adapted to the purpose, the wound from which cannot be discerned six hours after the operation.

Mr. K. D. C., of Marlboro', Vt., aged 22 years, consulted me February 28th, 1847, for a direct Inguinal Hernia, of about one years' standing. The Hernia had got to be of great size, had descended into the scrotum, which it filled up. He was unable to retain it with any truss, and had in consequence been obliged to give up business in a great measure. I operated for its radical cure, February 28th. He remained under my care one week. It has never made its appearance since the operation.

Mr. J. C., of Fall River, Mass., aged 35 years, very fleshy, had a very large oblique Inguinal Hernia, which he had found it impossible to keep up with a truss. May 15th, 1847, I operated for the cure of the same. Cure complete.

Mr. J. B., Boston, aged about 24 years, had had for six years an oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side. The opening through which the protusion took place, I found so large as to admit three fingers readily. I performed my operation for its radical cure, May 20th, 1847. There has been no appearance of the Hernia since.

Mr. A. M., Gloucester, Mass., aged 27 years, consulted me for a Hernia and Varicocoele, both of over ten years' standing, and very troublesome, rendering it difficult and sometimes impossible for him to attend to his business. May 21st, I operated on the Hernia; May 24th, on the Varicocoele. He remained under my care two weeks. Both complaints were radically cured.

Mr. D. G. A., of Prospect, Me., seafaring man, placed himself under my care for the cure of an oblique Inguinal Hernia, of six years' standing, June, 1847. The Hernia had attained the size of a large hen's egg, and was partially irreducible. I operated for the radical cure of the same, June 1st. The last time I heard from him, two years afterwards, he was entirely well.

Mr. P., of Providence, aged about 54 years, consulted me in July, 1847, for an Inguinal Hernia of the right side, of sixteen years' standing. It was very large, and he had been unable to find any truss to retain it. For several years he had allowed it to remain down constantly. After a few days' preparatory treatment, I operated for its radical cure, July 10th. He left me cured, and has remained so.

Mr. D., of Boston, aged 26 years, had suffered much for several years, from a double Inguinal Hernia. Although he had worn a strong double truss, he had, at times, found it ineffectual for retaining the Hernia. It had several times become partially strangulated, causing excessive pain, and threatening his life. I operated for its radical cure, July 28th, 1847. He remained under my care two weeks, and left cured.

Mr. H., of Bridgewater, Mass., aged about 35 years, had been

troubled for seventeen years with an oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side. When it descended it became very painful. It was accompanied with a hydrocele of the spermatic cord. He came under my care in November, 1847. Left cured, and there has been no appearance of the Hernia since.

Mr. J. S., Gloucester, Mass., aged about 40 years, consulted me for a direct Inguinal Hernia of the right side, of long standing. The protruded mass was very large, consisting, I found on examination, of both bowel and omentum, the latter being about equal in size to a hen's egg, and irreducible. I found the adhesions so strong, that it was impossible to reduce it by taxis. I therefore cut down and removed the irreducible mass of omentum. Afterwards I operated for a radical cure, January 10th, 1848. He has had no trouble since.

Mr. H., of Boston, age about 28 years, had been troubled from boyhood with oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side. I operated for a radical cure of the same, March 31st, 1848. Hernia has never appeared since.

Mr. F. B., of Concord, Mass., consulted me, January, 1848, for an oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side, and a Femoral Hernia on the same side, the latter being of unusual size. They were of four years' standing, had descended freely, and he was unable to prevent the descent with a truss. Much of the time he had been unable to work with any comfort. January 20th, I operated on both. A radical cure was effected.

Mr. J. S., Valley Falls, R. I., came to me with an Inguinal Hernia on the right side, of fourteen years' standing. It had for a long time caused him great pain in the back and loins. Accompanying the Hernia was a small Hydrocele, and a Varicocele of the left side. He was a good deal broken down. October 5th, 1847, I operated for the cure of the Hernia; a day or two afterwards for the radical cure of the Varicocele and Hydrocele. Patient remained at my Infirmary three weeks. A permanent cure was effected of the three complaints, followed by a great improvement in the general health.

Mr. D. H., of Essex, Mass., aged 18 years, was ruptured and otherwise badly injured by a fall from the cars. Admitted to my

Infirmary, March 10th, 1848, previous to which he had been confined to his bed six months. Simultaneously with the Hernia, Varicocele appeared on the left side. March 10th, I operated on the Hernia; shortly afterwards on the Varicocele. April 5th, he left cured, and has had no trouble from either complaint since. He is now in California.

Mr. H. B. G., of Boston, consulted me for an oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side, of large size. The hernial opening was very large, so that a truss would not retain the protrusion. It descended readily beneath the truss, causing great inconvenience. I operated for its radical cure, March 6th, 1848. It has never appeared since.

Mr. J. J., of South Boston, aged 40 years, had had an Inguinal Hernia on the left side for two years. The opening was very large, and the Hernia could not be kept up with a truss, but descended freely into the scrotum. I operated on it, March 18, 1848. Cure was permanent.

Mr. A. J. W., of Boston, aged 27, placed himself under my care for the treatment of an Inguinal Hernia of the right side, March 24th, 1848. The hernial opening was large, and the protrusion not retainable by a truss. Operated, March 24th, and effected a radical cure.

Mr. W., of New Orleans, 35 years of age, had had an Inguinal Hernia of many years' standing, accompanied with Varicocele. He came to my Infirmary, 26th July, 1848. Left, August 7th, cured of both complaints.

H. E., of Charlestown, 9 years old, had a direct Inguinal Hernia of five years' standing. Trusses had been tried, and, as usual, to no purpose. Difficulty grew worse. Truss had caused much soreness of the parts. I operated on him, January 4th, 1849, and effected a radical cure of the Hernia.

Mr. M. A., of Essex, Mass., aged 61 years, accustomed to hard work, had an oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side, of five or six years' standing. Admitted to Infirmary, February 26th, 1849. Left cured, and has had no trouble since.

Mr. W., of Brookline, Mass., age 68 years, consulted me for an oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side, of five years' standing.

He had found it impossible to retain it with a truss. May 17, 1849, I operated for its radical cure. Hernia never appeared afterwards.

Mr. J. A., of Fall River, aged about 27 years. Admitted to my Infirmary, May 14, 1850. Had an oblique Inguinal Hernia of the right side, of several years' standing; also a Varicocele of the left side. May 14th, I operated on the Hernia; May 31st, on the Varicocele. A complete cure of both was effected. This patient had tried the best trusses without any relief, but rather an aggravation of his difficulties.

Mr. F., of Boston, about 30 years of age, came to me in June, 1849, with a very large direct Hernia, which he had never been able to keep up with a truss. June 6th, admitted to my Infirmary, and operated on. Left in a short time, radically cured.

Mr. M. F., of Portsmouth, N. H., aged about 23 years. Admitted to Infirmary, June, 1850. Had a very large direct Hernia of the right side, accompanied with Varicocele of the left side. June 14th, I operated on the Hernia; within a week, on the Varicocele—effecting a complete cure of both.

Mr. G. B., of Jamaica Plains, Mass., about 22 years of age. Admitted to Infirmary, Sept. 9th, 1850. Had a large Inguinal Rupture of the left side, which he had tried in vain to retain with a truss. Operated for its radical cure, Sept. 9th. Hernia never reappeared.

Mr. K., of Kennebunk, Me., aged about 27 years, very fleshy. Admitted to Infirmary, Oct. 22d, 1850. Had a very large direct Inguinal Rupture of long standing, which he had been unable to keep up with a truss. Patient called on me a few days since to show that he was completely cured.

Mr. M., of Fall River, Mass., aged about 46. Admitted to Infirmary, November, 1850. Had an oblique Inguinal Rupture of the size of a hen's egg. It was of several years' standing, and could not be kept up by a truss. Radical cure readily effected.

Mr. S., of Salem, aged 55, very fleshy. Admitted to Infirmary, December 9th, 1850. Had two very large Inguinal Ruptures which would descend in spite of the strongest truss. Operated, December 9th, for a radical cure, which was effected.



Mr. G. P., of Salem, aged about 37 years. Came to Infirmary, December, 1850. Had had for many years a direct Inguinal Hernia, accompanied with a Hydrocele. A radical cure of both complaints was effected.

#### CASES OF IRREDUCIBLE HERNIA.

During the month of June, 1844, Mr. D., aged 41 years, of thin habit of body, consulted me for a Femoral Hernia on both sides. That on the right was about the size of a butternut, and had been irreducible twenty years. He had worn a scoop truss a part of the time, and had been a great sufferer. This, to my surprise, I was able to reduce by taxis, continued for about half an hour. I immediately operated on it for a radical cure. The Hernia on the left side had not been irreducible so long as the other, but I found it impossible to reduce it by taxis, and therefore cut down and removed a portion of the contents of the tumor, which proved to be omentum, and which had increased to such an extent that it was impossible to return it. The patient was radically cured of both Herniae.

Mr. M., aged 55, very fleshy, weighing over three hundred pounds. Came to me in December, 1845, with an Umbilical Hernia of twenty years' standing, which had not been returned to its proper place during the whole time, and was considered irreducible. On the 22d of December I made my first attempt to reduce it by taxis. The next day I made another trial, and so on for the several succeeding days, working on it for some half an hour or more once or twice in twenty-four hours, until, on the 27th, I succeeded in reducing it completely. A radical cure was then easily effected.

September, 1846, Miss H., aged 35, of spare habit, came under my care with an Omental Femoral Hernia, of two years' standing. The omentum had been irreducible from six to eight months. During this time she had been able to do but little work,—had suffered much from attacks of colic, which could with difficulty be relieved. Finding it impossible to effect the reduction by external pressure, I performed the operation usually done in strangulated

Hernia. I found strong adhesions existing between the sac and omentum. These I found it difficult to break up, as is almost always the case in Femoral Hernia. This being done, and a slight enlargement of the ring having been made, the reduction was readily effected. A radical cure followed this operation.

July, 1847, Mrs. K., aged about 43, of spare habit, came to consult me for two Inguinal Herniae. The one on the right side had been irreducible from three to four years. The protrusion was about the size of an English walnut. I found it impossible to reduce it by taxis, and therefore operated with the knife. The operation was successful, and was followed by a radical cure.

Mrs. K., about 45 years of age, of robust person, consulted me, May, 1847, for an omental Inguinal Hernia of the left side, of sixteen years' standing. For nine years it had been irreducible. She had been under the care of eminent surgeons, without, however, obtaining relief. At their suggestion she had worn a scoop truss, which seemed to afford little or no relief. During a part of the time she had been unable to walk, and finally had become much broken down in health by her sufferings. I found, on examination, that there was much water in the sac, and probably for that reason no adhesions of any consequence. I therefore concluded to perform a subcutaneous operation. This I did, and upon enlarging the ring, the protruded mass readily slipped back into the abdomen. I afterwards operated on this, and on a reducible Femoral Hernia of the other side, for a radical cure.

Capt. S., aged 40 years, came under my care in January, 1848. He had an omental Intestinal Hernia, which had descended into the scrotum. The omental portion had been irreducible for five years. This I removed. Patient suffered little inconvenience from the operation, and I soon after operated successfully for the radical cure of the Intestinal Hernia.

Mrs. H., aged 38, somewhat corpulent, came to me in May, 1848, with a very large Inguinal Rupture on the right side, and an irreducible Femoral Rupture on the left side. Her sufferings, she informed me, had been very great, sometimes almost intolerable. Finding it impossible to reduce the tumor on the left side, I cut down upon it. Finding the contents to be omentum entirely, I

removed that portion which could not be returned, and restored the remainder to the abdominal cavity. The patient soon recovered from this operation, so that I was enabled to operate on this side as well as on the Hernia of the right side, for a radical cure, which proved entirely successful, restoring the patient to health, and freedom from the severe pain with which she had so long been afflicted.

Mr. K., of Acton, Mass., aged 54. Admitted to Infirmary, Nov., 1848. Had an irreducible omental Femoral Hernia of several years' standing. It was very painful, and obliged him to give up work. Being unable to reduce it by taxis, I removed the protruded mass, and afterwards operated with success for a radical cure.

Capt. R., aged about 55, of spare habit, came to me in the month of November, 1850, with an irreducible Femoral Hernia on the left side, of seven years' standing. I found, on cutting down, that it contained omentum only. Having been out for a long time, it had become considerably enlarged, and was not fit to be returned; I therefore removed it. The patient very soon recovered from the operation, and was radically cured.

Mrs. B., aged about 25, consulted me in June, 1841, for an irreducible Femoral Hernia, of thirteen years' standing. She had suffered much at different times from attacks of colic. I tried in vain to effect the reduction by taxis, and therefore resorted to the operation. I found very strong adhesions existing, and was obliged to enlarge the ring considerably, in order to effect the reduction. No inconvenience was experienced from the operation, and the patient soon recovered.

Mr. C., aged about 24 years, came to me with an irreducible Omental Hernia of recent occurrence. It was very painful, so much so that he had been unable to wear a truss, or any kind of support, and most of the time had not been able to walk. The soreness was so great that I could not try the taxis to any extent; I therefore cut down upon it, and returned it, the patient suffering little inconvenience from the operation. A cure was effected in this case, and the patient restored to health.

Miss V., aged about 35, consulted me, December, 1851, for an irreducible Femoral Hernia, of ten years' standing. She had suffered much, at times, from partial strangulation, to which she



was almost constantly subject. Protracted vomiting or retching occurring at frequent intervals, and sometimes continuing for two or three days, had rendered existence oftentimes a burden to her. I endeavored to reduce the protrusion by taxis, but without success, and finally was obliged to resort to the operation that I usually perform in such cases. I found the Hernia to consist of omentum, a portion of which I had to remove. I afterwards operated successfully for its radical cure.

Dr. Heaton, hearing from various sources that he is supposed to be, according to his previous intention, at the present time in Europe, desires to correct such an impression.

He will for the present remain in Boston, and may be found at his residence, No. 2, Exeter Place, or at No. 40, Lincoln Street.

He continues to receive patients as heretofore, and to attend to the radical cure of Hernia or Rupture, in all its forms, including both Reducible Hernia and those cases usually called Irreducible; also to the treatment and cure of Varicocele, Hydrocele, &c., and to Uterine diseases.



